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# Lenten Meditation: The Way of the Cross, n.d.

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THE WAY OF THE CROSS

As twilight fell over the immortal city of Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday more than 1900 years ago a man stood on the brow of the Mt. of Olives looking down upon the ancient city of his people, his God, and His death. Mean houses, crooked narrow streets and all the little rawnesses of the life of the men and women of Jerusalem had melted into the purple shadows from the West. Eventide had come once more to the immortal city of the saints and prophets and under the magic of twilight Jerusalem clothed itself again with the garments of its immemorial romance. The darkness grew deeper and deeper until only one single glory remained -- only one memory of all the faithful years -- only one reminder that in those faithless streets heroes had walked and saints had shed their blood for the God and Father of Him who stood watching upon the Mount of Olives. Only the lights in the temple were shining--a symbol of the eternal and immutable fact that the lights of a church may burn even though the spirit that first lighted them has died long ago.

And so the Man who had walked the Way of the Cross for 33 long years stood and watched the twilight creep over the valley of the Kedron and up the slopes of the Mount of Olives. He had stood there before--and He would stand there once more--to wait and pray for the tender and merciful hand of Him who would bring strength to His weary body for the last few steps on the Way of the Cross. But that would be a time of silence, of prayer, of eyes searching heaven for the Angel with the cup. Now was the last time to speak -- to tell Jerusalem what He had been trying to do these many years--to summarize once more all the infinite love and tenderness which had driven Him along the Way of the Cross for a third of a century. With the hosannas of the first Palm Sunday behind Him -- with the hours of loneliness and betrayal before Him -- with the lights of the temple shining in the tears in His eyes -- He speaks: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing -- and ye would not!"

My dear brother and sister in God, the world has never heard a more horrible indictment. And it becomes all the more terrible when the realization suddenly sweeps over us that He is still standing there. Jerusalem has become all the cities of the world, the Mount of Olives has grown into the hills of five continents, we have decided to kill His prophets with indifference rather than with stones -- but He is still standing there and His voice still rings out over the world: ye would not. 1900 years ago His way from Bethlehem to Calvary was marked by the falling of His tears -- and for 19 centuries the world has succeeded in making its history of war and bloodshed, of hatred and violence, of coldness and indifference, a continual walking of the Way of Sorrows for Him. Not yet is His journey done, not yet is His way ended, not yet are His tears dry. He may today speak only through our feeble voices and work only through our faltering hands--and yet I say to you before God that you and I need nothing more bitterly than a few frail Godgiven moments in which our voices, ashamed of making the Way of the Cross so long and so hard for Him, may rise to the throne of the Eternal

O patient Christ! when long ago  
O'er Old Judea's rugged hills  
Thy willing feet went to and fro  
To find and comfort human ills --  
Did once Thy tender, earnest eyes  
Look down the solemn centuries  
And see the coldness of our Lives?  
O let these thoughts wake our shame (etc)

Over in Jerusalem there is to this day the great Via Dolorosa, the traditional street which begins at the judgment hall of Pilate and winds its way to the "Chapel of the Raising of the Cross" in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. From beginning to end it takes little more than an hour to travel, and many pilgrims have gone there to walk the road which our Lord once tread. But the real Way of the Cross is much longer than that. It begins in the eternity of silence in the counsels of the Triune God for the salvation of men, winds its way through the hearts of countless men and women who have made it either a way of Joy or a way of Sorrow for Him, and pauses today as far as we are concerned, here in this Church. Here in the invisible presence of Him whose way will not be long any more, we shall once again appeal to the men and women who come here to consider this Church the place where finally two ways must meet--their won way and the Way of the Cross, the way of sin and the way of forgiveness, the way of darkness and the way of the home lights of eternity. This is the issue before us this week and it must be clearly and sharply defined. We are not here to gain new members for Bethlehem; we are not here to hold up the advantages of belonging to the Lutheran Church -- we are here only and alone to present the infinite and gentle tenderness of the immortal Shepherd for some poor wandering souls who have lost the Way of the Cross. And perhaps these noonday services, arranged with sad unfailing devotion by the members of this Church, are God's opportunity to do just that. Many years ago there stood in Germany an old castle with two towers standing upright and far apart. Between them the owner suspended wires thus making a great Aeolian harp. But he soon discovered that the harp played but seldom. Common winds went through it without even a whistle. But when the winds became strong or came from a certain direction, the harp began to sing and to play and the air was filled with melody. Even so it is in your life and my life. The daily round of common things, the unceasing repetition of the same experiences, the deadening treadmill of Twentieth century life--all these can no longer move the heartstrings of our being in deep and compelling answer to the winds of God moving over the earth and over the hearts of men. And then God comes and gives you a new experience -- perhaps the rolling tones of the organ -- perhaps the voice of the pastor praying here for the souls of his people, perhaps only a few moments of silence -- and there comes to you a new vision of the long Way of the Cross and a new faith in Him who stands even today waiting for you.

It is the world's great, eternal tragedy that so many men and women still make every effort to keep as far away from the Way of the Cross as possible. All the years of their cold, miserable lives are spent in trying to avoid the issue. If, and so I would ask you in God's name when you leave this Church today go and tell them they are attempting the impossible. Do you remember the story of Balaam? He had been invited by King Balak to come and curse the people of God. On his way the Lord met him on the open road -- and Balaam turned out and passed by. Then the Lord met him as he passed between two vineyards -- and again Balaam was able to pass by. Finally the Lord stood before him in a narrow pass where there was no turning to the right or to the left and no excuse and no escape and Balaam had to stand and face the issue. My dear friend, the Lord God is still doing that today! Try to run away from the living Christ and one by one the far and hopeful horizons of youth come closer and closer, the road becomes narrower, and life closes in on you until there is nothing left but the eternal Christ and the ~~and~~ inevitable question: "O, my son and my daughter, what have I done unto you and wherein have I wearied you?" Sooner or later, my dear friend, your way must meet the Way of the Cross. There can be no question about that. The only question that remains is: When will that meeting be? Will it be today when the Way of the Cross is still the way of the forgiveness of sins and peace with God or will it be tomorrow when the voice of Jesus speaking to Jerusalem "Ye would not" will be transformed and translated into the voice of the conquering and judging Christ speaking to the world "I know you not?" There is the issue before us this week and I tell you again today -- that there will be no answer to the problems which trouble and perplex you this morning and no relief of the tearing pain in your heart and no



drying of your tears until you have met Him walking the Way of the Cross and have touched the hem of the garment of His eternal righteousness and peace -- the righteousness and peace bought for you with blood and agony and tears two thousand years when he went down from the Mount of Olives to a little hill outside the gates of Jerusalem to pour down this blood upon a world that even today is so fearfully ready to pass by.

And so my first appeal to you today is: Come home. If your feet have wandered, if your heart has strayed, if you have lost the glorious surrender of the faith of your childhood. Come home. Twilight fell upon Jerusalem more than 1900 years ago -- twilight falls upon a troubled and bewildered world today -- and before it darkens down into a blacker night than man has ever known before you must be safe in the arms of Jesus. One more time this week the final sunshine of his pity will fall sweet over the sad heart and the aching head and in that last twilight you must find your hearts desire and the end of your dreams:

I take O